

UB Law Forum

Volume 16
Number 1 *Fall 2003*

Article 43

10-1-2003

Highest Honors: Six Honored with Distinguished Alumni Awards

UB Law Forum

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum

Recommended Citation

UB Law Forum (2003) "Highest Honors: Six Honored with Distinguished Alumni Awards," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 16 : No. 1 , Article 43.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol16/iss1/43

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.

Alumni Association

Highest honors

Six honored with Distinguished Alumni Awards



Left to right: David F. Smith '78, Lawrence H. Wagner '49, Barbra A. Kavanaugh '83, Hon. Hugh B. Scott '74 and Michael R. Wolford '68.

The names were familiar and the accolades were genuine on April 30 at UB Law School's annual Distinguished Alumni Dinner.

Moderated by Lynn A. Clarke '83, UB Law Alumni Association president, the dinner acknowledged two milestone classes: the Class of 1943, celebrating its 60th anniversary, and the Class of 1953, celebrating its 50th.

The honoree for private practice, Lawrence H. Wagner '49, a retired partner in the Buffalo law firm Jaeckle, Fleischmann and Mugel, was introduced by Jaeckle, Fleischmann partner Howard S. Rosenhoch '76.

Rosenhoch noted that Wagner distinguished himself in a most distin-

guished UB Law School class, graduating magna cum laude, and began his career as an assistant attorney general in Albany.

At Jaeckle, Fleischmann, where he began work in 1959 and became a partner in 1961, Wagner headed the litigation department for many years, served on the management committee "and has been regarded for many years as counsel to the firm. I do not mean of counsel, I mean he was the law firm's lawyer."

Wagner also is a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, and Rosenhoch added: "Membership in that group is a dignity bestowed on those few lawyers that are the very best in their state or province and those that

have the integrity, personal and ethical, to qualify."

"Larry's skill as a trial lawyer has been exemplified by his boundless dedication to his firm, his friends, his uncompromising commitment to integrity and honesty in the practice of law, and his overriding respect for people, be they partners, adversaries or judges," Rosenhoch said. "These are the things that have defined Larry's illustrious career. And in his own quiet way, Larry challenges us, each of us that he touches, to strive for the integrity and professionalism that define Larry Wagner."

Wagner was brief in accepting the honor, noting that "the award itself is one that any of us would be very hap-

py to receive."

He had kind words for UB Law, saying, "The school has done well for me over the years. I spent a lot of my time dealing with young lawyers, many of whom are UB Law School graduates. They have performed well not just for themselves, but for the community at large."

Clarke then introduced Hon. Hugh B. Scott '74, U.S. magistrate judge for the Western District of New York, who received the award for the judiciary.

She noted that at age 34, Scott was elected to a 10-year term on the Buffalo City Court bench, re-elected in 1984, and in June 1995 became the first African-American jurist appointed to the federal bench in the Western District of New York. For the past 21 years, Clarke said, Scott also has lectured in trial technique at UB Law School.

Running through a long list of Scott's community involvement, Clarke said, "He is one of those rare individuals who combines an impeccable knowledge of and respect for the law with an accessibility not always found in those who have attained his high station in life. There has never been an individual more suited to the bench, and as he has worked hard, done justice and advanced in his career, he has distinguished not only himself but his alma mater, UB Law School, as well."

"In this world there are rare individuals who have a unique combination of talent, intelligence, temperament, perspective, humanity and yes, charm. Judge Scott is one of those individuals."

Scott said, "In January I will celebrate my 20th year as a judge, and over these many years I have reflected a great deal on my good fortune in living a dream that I had begun many, many years ago that I might have some impact on the delivery of justice to this community. As a young lawyer I

was awarded so many great affirmative opportunities, and for that I will be always grateful.

"I really owe so much to this school for giving me the opportunity to enter one of the greatest and most rewarding professions anyone could aspire to join. I have had so many mentors and role models in my professional career. Some of the role models I have had had no idea they were being watched so closely. This reaches all the way back to my first day in class at UB Law when I met my first professor, Jack Hyman. He was teaching torts and made it clear to all of us that he had great expectations and he believed we could



Dean Nils Olsen applauds as Vice Dean Alan S. Carrel '67 presents the award to David F. Smith '78.

all live up to them. We really began to believe in ourselves. Failing wasn't offered as an option, so we worked hard to justify his expressed confidence in us.

"We should constantly be aware that many young lawyers look to us, as the older generation now, to set standards of practice, standards of civility and ethics, by our everyday actions."

Hon. Thomas M. Van Strydonck '73, chief administrative judge for the 7th Judicial District of New York, introduced Michael R. Wolford '68, managing partner in the firm Wolford & Leclair.

Van Strydonck noted that Wolford, after a brief stint at Jaeckle, Fleischmann, served as an assistant U.S. at-

torney in Rochester and prosecuted the "Flower City Eight," a group of Quakers who ransacked the local draft board in protest of the Vietnam War. A newspaper historical report, he said, noted that there were some guns in the office, and Wolford asked one of the defendants in cross-examination, "What would you have done had you come into possession of these weapons, these guns?" The reply came: "I would probably have turned the guns into plowshares."

"The paper did not report what the prosecutor's follow-up was," Van Strydonck noted wryly.

Wolford worked for the Rochester firm Nixon Hargrave for 21 years, then left in 1993 to set up his own law firm, going into practice with his daughter, Elizabeth. The firm now also includes his son Jim.

"Mike is from the old school of thinking about his work as a profession," Van Strydonck said. "He recognizes that there is a responsibility to give back to the community. Mike's enthusiasm for the law and his responsibility to give back to the community is contagious. Every member of his law firm strives to have at least one active case with the Legal Services Corporation in Rochester."

"Mike makes all of us proud to be lawyers as well as alumni of this great Law School."

Said Wolford: "I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the fine professors whom I was fortunate enough to have as teachers at the Law School. They were not only great teachers, but they also taught us all how to be professionals and ethical practitioners."

"The lessons I learned at this law school 38 years ago are still with me and hopefully will continue into the future. One of the principles I learned from those days is the following: You are obligated to provide a client with the finest representation possible consistent with the ethical duty you owe

Alumni Association

to the court and the community. That principle applies whether it is a pro bono case or you are representing a Fortune 500 company. Simply stated, there are no shortcuts.

"UB Law School has provided me with opportunities that in many ways are priceless, and as a result I will always be indebted to it. I am very proud to be an alumnus of this school."

Denise E. O'Donnell '82, president-elect of the UB Law Alumni Association and a partner in Hodgson Russ, introduced the next honoree, Barbra A. Kavanaugh '83, former assistant attorney general in charge of the Buffalo regional office who is now running for comptroller of the City of Buffalo.

She noted that Kavanaugh fought discrimination in her tenure at Neighborhood Legal Services, and as a member of the Buffalo Common Council, advocated for public access to the waterfront, the arts, a living wage ordinance and the public schools.

"In public and in private, Barbra Kavanaugh has always stood for what is right, despite the political consequences," O'Donnell said. "And that is what distinguishes her as a true leader and makes her deserving of this public service award."

"To paraphrase an old Welsh proverb, she that would be a leader must be a bridge. Barbra has that special gift which leads people, even elected officials now and then, to reach consensus and bridge gaps which would otherwise be divisive."

"Anything and everything that I have done has grown directly from what I have received from UB Law School and the legal community here in Western New York," Kavanaugh said in accept-



Above: Lawrence H. Wagner '49, Right, Vice Dean Peter R. Pitegoff and Professor Robert S. Berger.

ing the award.

"You have to remember that I started law school as a divorced suburban mother, who came to law school because I needed a graduate degree to enhance my earning potential in journalism, and in law school you did not need to write a dissertation."

"Let's face it, I was a mediocre student at best. We used to say that I took the Q train right out of there. Yet you supported me and recognized my accomplishments."

She also noted the quality of the Western New York legal community: "This is a wonderful place to practice law. Practice here is professional, there is a high quality of practice, and there are challenging adversaries that are nonetheless respectful of the law and each other, and in many ways a community that is very giving to the larger community."

"Thank you for the award, but most of all I want to say a very overdue thank-you to all the people who have supported me and contributed to what for me has been an extremely rewarding career."

Law School Dean R. Nils Olsen Jr. introduced Assemblyman Paul A.



Tokasz, receiving the award for a non-alumnus.

As majority leader of Assembly, Olsen noted, Tokasz "directs the day-to-day operations of the legislative session, sets the daily agenda, and oversees debate and voting on all legislation. He is easily one of UB's hardest-working advocates in Albany. His efforts have been instrumental in obtaining state funding for many important university initiatives." These include the Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics, the Center for the Arts, and the Western New York Family Violence Clinic and Regional Resource Center at the Law School.

"His support has been instrumental



Left to right: Hon. E. Jeannette Ogden '83, Stephanie Williams Torres '00, Lenora B. Foote '97, Paulette E. Ross '97 and Trini E. Ross '92



Left, Sharon L. Nosenchuck '94

in the continuing support and success of the University and the Law School," Olsen said.

Christie Cantor accepted the award on behalf of her father, who was at work in Albany. She read some remarks that the assemblyman had prepared, beginning with a quote from Robert F. Kennedy: "In a democratic society, law is the form which free men give to justice. The glory of justice and the majesty of law are created not just by the Constitution, nor the courts, nor by the officers of the law, nor by the lawyers, but by the men and women who constitute our society,

who are protectors of the law as they themselves are protected by it. Justice, in short, is everybody's business."

"As a lawmaker," Cantor said, "Paul Tokasz recognizes that policy formation without public participation is indeed a road that should not be traveled by anyone who is elected to create a form of law which imparts justice to free men and women. Lawmaking is everybody's business and is the foundation of our representative government."

"Thank you to all of you for all you do as advocates for your clients, the people who bring justice to our community in Buffalo."

Finally, Law School Vice Dean Alan S. Carrel introduced David F. Smith '78, who as president of National Fuel Gas Distribution Corp. received the award for exemplary performance in business.

Smith was a brilliant student, Carrel said, who "became a superstar in business at a very young age. I can say with certainty that he is an honest, fair, tenacious person whose commitment to the company is endless. He has incredibly high energy, and he is an enthusiastic positive thinker who works long, hard

hours. He is also a great planner who thinks 10 years ahead.

"David is a natural and dynamic leader who is both a team player and a team builder. He brings out the best in everyone. He helps people set ambitious goals and then assists them in achieving heights they never thought possible.

"He faces difficult issues with integrity, courage and the highest moral standards and does what he feels is the right thing to do. As tough as he is when necessary, he is also kind and caring and the best friend a person could have. He is not at all impressed with his own importance and remains genuine and down to earth. David treats everyone with respect and especially likes to focus attention on those he feels are underappreciated."

"We are so fortunate to have an excellent law school in Western New York," Smith said in accepting the award, "and arguably, with enough use of a MasterCard and an understanding spouse, it is within reach for anybody. That is so critical."

Smith said he worked at National Fuel while he was at UB Law, and "I knew that was where I wanted to spend my career. The lawyers there always did the right thing – it did not matter if there were a thousand people screaming on the other side. I am very proud of National Fuel, and I am very proud of my career there."

He also thanked his family and the UB Law Alumni Association: "When you are honored by people like that, it means more than anything."